

Education and Ethnic Minorities in Malta

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Foreword

This work sheds light on Maltese educational provision in the context of migration. The document is written by three authors who are informed by a commitment to social justice, critical citizenship and active democracy. Three educators who share a vision of an educational world that can be a realm of practice that is rooted in the language of critique as much as it is grounded in that of hope.

As a political issue, migration has generated a proliferation of meanings and emotions. While the terrain is contested, the dominant discourse on migration has been selective and populist in nature, centering around policing, incalcertation, prohibition, marginalisation, exclusion and deportation. Emotionally, public debates have been mainly characterised by fear and anxiety linked to a popular feeling that our archipelago is being invaded by ‘inferior’ others (sic.) and, as indicated in this work, to a selective reading of migration patterns to Malta. Pedagogically, public and private debates have often been disjointed and atomised, and have rarely come close to excavating the links between forced migration and the multiple layers of oppression, violence, post/colonialism, exploitation, wealth extraction, global warming and neoliberal economic arrangements.

On the educational front, this document indicates that while some schools are becoming increasingly celebratory in their approach to multiculturalism, the educational terrain is still defined in terms of the construction of the migrant child as a ‘disabled’ other (sic.). In the absence of a policy dealing with migration and education, the images, discourses, provisions and strategies employed in the context of migration are borrowed from the dictionary and manual of disability and learning difficulties, thereby reinforcing the invisibility of the migrant child.

The task ahead of the educators and leaders who wish to reclaim the dignity of the migrant child is multifaceted and complex. Adequate provision cannot materialise in a context characterised by a refusal to engage critically the current social, political, cultural and economic practices and discourses that legitimate racism, discrimination and exploitation. In the absence of such engagement by the education community, and helplessness generated by the lack of a clear sense of what values need to be defended by practitioners, the education system will continue to lack the moral and ethical referents which should normally inform visions, social and cultural practices as well as pedagogical interventions.

This document constitutes an important addition to the local literature on social change and genuine democracy. It underscores the dialectical relationship between reflection and action and engages the readers in dialogues that range from the histories of local prejudices to current educational provision. As a ‘critical-minded optimist’, I welcome the publication of this document as another tool in my passionate struggle for social justice.

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Prof. Borg lectures internationally and is an external expert of the European Commission. He is also involved in several European and international projects, networks and research consortia Prof. Borg sits on editorial advisory boards of several international journals and is editor of the Maltese Review of Educational Research (MRER), formerly known as the Maltese Journal of Education Research (JMER). Prof. Borg is former Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of Malta.

Preface

This study, which forms part of the e-Spices learning partnership (acting as background data) was inspired by an earlier study commissioned by The European Racism and Xenophobia Information Network (RAXEN). Unfortunately in this earlier study only a very restricted statistic would be published in the final publication, a statistic that would not do justice to the actual situation and could be interpreted differently by the different parties concerned with the issue. This was one reason why we thought that it would be a good idea to publish the research that was behind the official statistic. We would like the general public to be exposed to a deeper analysis of the situation, how (or if) students from different ethnic backgrounds are being integrated within the local educational set-up.

We also hope to set a precedent, collecting data regarding the issue and assessing the level of integration within Maltese schools. Hopefully, in the years to come, others will carry out the study again and ideally improve the research we made.

The e-Spices project seeks to promote the awareness of diversity in Europe and provides adults-professionally-in-contact-with-mobility and adults-in-mobility with training materials. The data in this study provides a much-needed background for identifying and better understanding the complexity of the local situation, with specific emphasis on the provision of educational services.

The e-Spices Malta partner decided to commission and publish the study in question, hence the booklet you have in your hand. In addition, we gratefully thank all those who collaborated to the work, in particular Carmelo Abela MP, Prof. Carmel Borg, Director George Borg, Sina Bugeja, Pastor Ahmed Bugri, Kenneth Busuttil, Maria Camilleri, Doreen Coleiro, Imam Muhammed El Sadi, Prof. Gabriella Klein, Dr. Janet Mifsud, Andrew Mizzi, Sr. Margaret Ormond OP, Michael Parnis, Paul Sammut, Valerie Sciberras and Fra Ġwann Xerri OP. Without their invaluable help this publication would not have materialised.

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Msida

3 August 2010

Prologue

The SPICES training methodology and the e-SPICES resources: Their transferability to the school context

The e-SPICES project is a Grundtvig Learning Partnership and its acronym means electronic Social Promotion of Intercultural Communication Expertise and Skills (2008-1-IT2-GRU06-00547 1; www.e-spices.net) coordinated by the University of Perugia (Italy). The project partners are from Belgium, Germany, Greece, Malta, Poland, and Turkey.

e-SPICES originates from another European project, SPICES, a Grundtvig training course project, Social Promotion of Intercultural Communication Expertise and Skills (224945-CP-1-2005-1-IT-GRUNDTVIG-G11; www.trainingspices.net) coordinated by the University of Perugia (Italy). Its partners are from Bulgaria, Germany, Italy, Malta, Slovenia, and Spain.

The SPICES has produced an important tool for intercultural mediators and communication trainers: SPICES GUIDELINES. This manual provides intercultural mediators and communication trainers as well as L2 educators with theoretical and practical tools and prototypical training activities in order to allow them to create their own training material. Knowledge about the use of these tools can be acquired through attendance of specific SPICES training courses (one of such courses has been carried out in Malta in September 2008, whereas Maltese have attended SPICES training courses carried out in Italy).

The e-SPICES has implemented not only a website but also an electronic platform – a Virtual Communication and Learning Environment / VCLE - where resources designed in SPICES and in e-SPICES are now made available to adult educators and candidates. (Subscriptions can be made through the transnational coordinator: gabriellaklein@gabriellaklein.eu).

Although these projects are adult education projects, they are also very effective in a non-adult educational context such as schools. In fact they are very effective in any context in which adult educators, professional or self-made trainers are providing education to non-adult learners. As a matter of fact, the SPICES Guidelines and the e-spices Virtual Communication and Learning Environment are explicitly created to be flexible and transferable to any learning context dealing with intercultural communication within bureaucratic-institutional settings; and schools are bureaucratic-institutional settings .

The question here is therefore: How can we adapt and adopt the SPICES Guidelines to a traditional school context?

The answer is necessarily threefold:

1. The school is an institutional context and therefore has to deal with both written and spoken bureaucratic texts, taking into consideration the school/family interaction; therefore it is extremely relevant for teachers to learn more about the bureaucratic-institutional communication.
2. This kind of real-life interaction and communication, being not easy, constitutes an urgent learning need, encompassing also many legal responsibilities and accountabilities; the

earlier children and adolescents learn about this, the easier they will manage their everyday life as active citizens.

3. In a migration context, children often become ‘intercultural mediators’ for their parents. Older children may also act as interpreters for younger children (cf. p.44).

So these are three very good reasons to transfer the SPICES methodology and the use of the e-SPICES VCLE into a non-adult educational context.

The question now becomes: How can this be done?

The answer has to take into account three perspectives:

1. the school as a bureaucratic institutional context of teacher-parent communication
2. the school as an anticipatory socialisation context for institutional everyday communication practices
3. the school as learning context for ‘intercultural mediation’.

I will now argue about the relevance of the SPICES methodology for these three axes of educational policy and propose concrete training actions which can be implemented:

1. The school as a bureaucratic institutional context of parent-teacher communication

In Turkey, the Parent-Teacher Associations (established by the Turkish Ministry of Education through Legal Regulation 2005/2573, 31.5.2005 – 25831) have the extremely important aim to include parents in the educational life of their children. This includes concrete activities with the children’s parents or tutors as well as social initiatives in the schools’ neighbourhoods and social environment. Let us see this as a good practice that should be also adopted in Maltese schools.

Using the SPICES Guidelines and the e-SPICES VCLE as a basis for training activities, the schools could organise two kinds of learning sessions:

- intercultural communication for teaching and administrative staff (e.g. interpreters and cultural assistants, cf. p.14)
- intercultural communication for parents.

Within the scholastic context, immigrants inevitably constitute a resource: their point of view can provide non-migrants with a better understanding of the communication problems that not only migrant adults have to face when coming in contact with the institutions and the bureaucracy. This helps to overcome ethno-centric and euro-centric perspectives, opening people’s minds, also by teaching of the language(s) and culture(s) of the country of origin of immigrant children in a mutual inclusive education perspective (cf. p.14) where the students’ parents should be involved (cf. p.p40-41) and boosted to promote initiatives that celebrate diversity and encourage cultural exchange and enrichment (cf. p.15). Such actions would foster understanding and appreciation of different cultures (cf. p.43) as a necessary basis for social cohesion.

By attending a SPICES training course, teachers and school administrators can be trained in intercultural communication practices becoming then able to provide three kinds of courses for immigrant parents or, as we prefer to say, parents/adults-in-mobility:

- a course for only adults-in-mobility
 - a course for classes entailing both adults-in-mobility and adults-non-in-mobility
 - a course for classes entailing adults-in-mobility and adults-in-contact-with-mobility.
2. The school as an anticipatory socialisation context for institutional everyday communication

practices

Today the scholastic institution has the increasing responsibility of taking into account the learners' needs, preparing them for the future everyday life challenges.

In terms of interaction/communication, our everyday life becomes more than ever complex in the bureaucratic sector. Whereas 20-30 years ago an application form for demanding some institutional document was just one page or even only half a page, today it may encompass pages and pages including not only the form with the application itself, but also instructions of how to fill in the form in question. Therefore it is extremely important and necessary to prepare the future generation as soon as possible to this kind of everyday communication practice.

3. The school as learning context for 'intercultural mediation'

Such training activities constitute an enormous learning potential also for teachers and administrators themselves. In such a way, the migrant population becomes a real training resource from which to learn much about intercultural communication.

It is not by chance that the acronym SPICES itself is meaningful; it reflects indeed the global spirit of these projects and their partnerships. As a result, one can conclude that these projects act like 'spices' one can add to any kind of formal, non-formal and informal adult learning context dealing with intercultural communication issues in the public institutions.

The present book shows for the first time data collected by its authors Colin Calleja, Michael Grech and Bernard Cauchi through which we can realise how the migration issue is perceived in Malta. Of particular interest are the difficulties that schools face when they have to deal with this phenomenon. From all these data emerge the need to receive more tools in order to face the multicultural diversity and the intercultural communication correctly. This highlights the importance of programmes like SPICES and resources like e-SPICES that can support schools in understanding and strategising for an improved communication practice especially with parents of these children.

SPICES and e-SPICES can contribute to guarantee what has been underlined by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (2006; cf. p.15): "equality of opportunity and access to services" as "a fundamental right and key value of the European Union".

In this perspective it becomes extremely important also to avoid a prejudicial and discriminatory language use of our words. Therefore I want to introduce here the definition of especially two words that people often pronounce uncritically in their everyday language, i.e. "race" and "ethnicity" and related expressions (not to mention many others of this kind), extracted from the Glossary of the official website of the American Anthropological Association "RACE – Are We So Different?" (<http://understandingrace.org/home.html>):

race: a recent idea created by western Europeans following exploration across the world to account for differences among people and justify colonization, conquest, enslavement, and social hierarchy among humans. The term is used to refer to groupings of people according to common origin or background and associated with perceived biological markers. Among humans there are no races except the human race. In biology, the term has limited use, usually associated with organisms or populations that are able to interbreed. Ideas about race are culturally and socially transmitted and form the basis of racism, racial classification and often complex racial identities. (highlight by the Author)

Based on this we have:

racial classification: the practice of classifying people into distinct racial groups based on certain characteristics such as skin color or geographic region, often for the purpose of ranking

them based on believed innate differences between the groups.

These two words have to be avoided today in order to fight against racism. Racism: the use of race to establish and justify a social hierarchy and system of power that privileges, preferences or advances certain individuals or groups of people usually at the expense of others. Racism is perpetuated through both interpersonal and institutional practices

Often we assist also to an inappropriate use of ethnic defining the ‘other’, the ‘different’ as “ethnic”: ethnicity: an idea similar to race that groups people according to common origin or background. The term usually refers to social, cultural, religious, linguistic and other affiliations although, like race, it is sometimes linked to perceived biological markers. Ethnicity is often characterized by cultural features, such as dress, language, religion, and social organization.

In reality every human being has his/her specific ethnicity and is therefore “ethnic”. Consequently, it is nonsense to say “ethnic food”, “children from ethnic origin” etc. meaning everyone and everything else from one’s own traditions, origin etc. Not only is it scientifically nonsense, but it also leads to what has been defined as “ethnocentrism”:

ethnocentrism: the deeply felt belief that your own cultural ways are universal, natural, normal, and even superior to other cultural ways.

This book hopefully contributes to open minds, acquiring a critical sense of language use and decentralizing our point of view: migrants are an enrichment bringing their cultural and linguistic heritage to our world.

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Introduction

This study explores the relation between institutionalised education and ethnic minorities. The issue has for long been considered as irrelevant, owing to a prevalent mistaken belief as to the common ethnic and historical origins and character of the inhabitants of the islands. Nevertheless, since 2002, when boat loads of asylum seekers (predominantly from African countries) started landing regularly on Maltese shores, the a-historic assumption that Maltese society is a cohesive community started to be seriously challenged. This research aims:

- To analyse the Maltese context from political, historical and cultural perspectives
- To study the multiethnic realities within Maltese society and the often negative perceptions due to prejudice and ignorance
- To explore if and how educational institutions are perpetuating such perceptions and/or addressing these realities
- Offer recommendations for developing long term strategies for the integration of migrants within Maltese society and develop a more accepting society.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

Chapter One

A contextual analysis:

Malta, a country of migrants

With a population of slightly over 400,000 inhabitants and a surface area of 316km², Malta is one of the most densely populated nations in the world. Malta has always been home to people belonging to various ethnic minorities. By ethnic minority we understand a group defined by a perceived (not necessarily factual): “... *range ...of communal characteristics: lingual, ancestral, regional, religious, etc., which are seen to be the basis of distinctive identity.*”¹

In recent years the issue of the integration of minorities within Maltese society has been closely related to immigration from Africa, at least in people’s minds. This is somewhat imprecise, since African immigrants constitute less than half the number of foreigners belonging to different ethnic minorities that have come from abroad and reside on the islands. Yet, given popular and official perceptions which consider these to represent the major integration ‘challenge’ (most Maltese would use the word ‘problem’), this section will consider the fate of these immigrants as the litmus test in relation to which the island’s ability and intention to integrate minorities is assessed.



¹ The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought p. 285

African immigration to Malta

For centuries Malta has received people from abroad; from different nations and ethnic groups.

As of the first years of the new millennium, the country has been facing a steady inflow of African and Middle-Eastern asylum seekers. As already stated, these are not the only arrivals to the island. A number of workers have

arrived from EU states. In addition, there are others that arrive from non-EU countries, the number of which actually exceeds those of immigrants arriving by boat from North Africa.²



As Vince Farrugia, the president of the local union of small entrepreneurs - (GRTU) admitted, these immigrants are making an important contribution to the local economy; performing jobs which Maltese workers are unwilling to carry out.³ Yet, a lot of Maltese consider them to be indigents living on local taxes and the national exchequer, ignoring the contributions made to their maintenance by the European Union and the UN. In addition, they are also perceived to constitute a 'threat' to the balance of the islands' demography and culture. Regarding the latter, African asylum seekers are generally considered to be the most 'culturally distant' from Maltese natives, in contrast to people who come from Europe. Because of this perceived difference, their integration is deemed by many to be highly unlikely.⁴

Asylum seekers generally end up on the islands while attempting to enter into Europe from North Africa. The total number of asylum seekers who entered Malta up to 2009 has been 12,000. The number of immigrants on the island is 5,200.⁵ The rest were either repatriated, re-settled elsewhere or left the islands through their own initiative, in some way or another. This means that African immigrants constitute only about 1.4% of the population on the islands.

² *The Sunday Times* 29th March 2009

³ Vince Farrugia on the TV programme *Dissett*, aired by the national television station PBS on the 24th of June 2008.

⁴ That this inability is largely perceived is evident if one considers language. African immigrants and Arabs generally learn Maltese within a few months following their arrival in Malta. On the other hand, Malta is home to a number of British residents who have been living here for decades. Most of these are unable to speak the language of the natives. Nonetheless, most Maltese a-priori consider the latter 'integrable' whereas believe that integration with the former is unlikely, if not undesirable.

⁵ Prime Minister Lawrence Gonzi, Parliamentary debate, 17th March 2009.

Nonetheless some Maltese feel that their islands are being ‘invaded’ and fear an Africanisation of their nation.

The reasons for this fear of African immigrants are many. Surely, as local anthropologist Mark Anthony Falzon (2009) has noted, the fact that these immigrants are crammed and de-facto ghettoised fosters the impression that their numbers are impressive. Moreover, their automatic detention following their arrival fuels suspicions as to their intents and character.



Detention

Illegal immigration is sanctioned by the *Immigration Act* of 1970 (amended in 1989, 1990, 2000, 2002, 2004 and 2007) and the *Refugee Act* of 2000. Maltese legal codes consider illegal entry into Maltese territory as an administrative and not as a criminal trespass. Yet, the detention of those caught without documents is automatic. Immigrants are normally locked-up in cage-like structures,⁶ without standing trial and for periods that generally exceed those stipulated by sentences meted to people who commit crimes that are much more serious. Alvaro Gil Robles had suggested that detention ought to be used as a last resort, in relation to immigrants who are

guilty of some crime. His appeal fell on deaf ears. Things have somewhat improved since his report was compiled. Yet conditions inside detention centres remain on the whole squalid and inhuman.⁷ At one point, an international aid organisation, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, that had been providing medical assistance at Maltese detention centres since 2008, suspended its activities due to the poor conditions in the detention centres and the obstinacy of the local government in maintaining such an inhuman and futile policy.

The official reason for the adoption of the automatic detention policy by the government is that it serves as a deterrent to would-be migrants, so that they will think twice before embarking from Africa to Malta. The fundamental fallacy of such reasoning is that no immigrant leaves Africa with Malta as the intended destination. Moreover, statistics themselves show that this

⁶ See Alvaro Gil-Robles, *Commissioner for Human Rights Report 20 e 21 October 2003*, p.6 and *Report by the LIBE Committee delegation on its visit to the administrative detention centres in Malta* pp. 6-8.

⁷ See *Le Figaro* 13th March 2009

policy is not working. The official number of immigrants entering illegally has been for some time on the increase. There were 57 immigrants in 2001, 1686 in 2002, 502 in 2003, 1388 in 2004, 1822 in 2005, circa 1400 in 2006, 1702 in 2007, 2775 in 2008⁸. During 2009 the number of immigrants who entered Malta reached 1475⁹.

Many immigrants complain about the conditions in the detention centres, some claiming to have been physically, morally and psychologically abused by Maltese officials. Immigrants also claim to suffer such abuses when released. In 2008, the Maltese press reported the case of Ismail Abubaker who was handcuffed and beaten up by police officers even though he was not resisting arrest.¹⁰



Photo by: Colin Calleja

⁸ Joseph M. Sammut (2009) Social Watch Malta – Kopin

⁹ Report of the commissioner for refugees as reported on the 8 o'clock news TVM on the 4th March, 2010

¹⁰ Tragically, Abubaker was violently killed in the summer of 2009, in an incident at a local entertainment establishment. Many believed the incident reflects the racism existing in the local entertainment industry.

Chapter Two

The Catholic Church in the picture

The absolute majority of the Maltese (96%) consider themselves to be Catholic. Around 50% attend Sunday mass.¹⁰ Alone in Europe, divorce and abortion are illegal in Malta. The church gathers more people than any other institution. Schools, both Catholic and secular, teach the Catholic religion. In state schools, religion teachers are approved by the Catholic Church and salaried by government. Every radio station has religious programmes. Most include the daily recital of the rosary. In addition, catechism classes for children and young adults are well attended.

Nevertheless, despite this strong catholic character, a basic Christian value - “I was a foreigner and you welcomed me” - is selectively put aside. A survey carried out in 2005 by *The Sunday Times*, the most widely read newspaper on the island, showed that around 90% of the Maltese are averse to having Palestinians, Arabs, Africans or Jews as neighbours.

We feel that the church is in a position to do much more on this issue. For example we feel that the Church needs to problematise the imagery projected in our churches. Maltese churches are full of white, if not actually blonde, saints, and angels, and black or dark devils and demons. The local church needs to critically examine themes like eurocentricism and the demonisation of ‘others’ that riddle local Catholic thought and practice. This, though not expressive of outright racism, could be a reflection of a deep-seated attitude. Theologically, the models and structures the church implicitly adopts are exclusively European with very limited, if any, representation of the contributions that people from developing countries, the so called ‘third world’, are giving to the Church. Consequently this gives the impression that non-European people can offer them nothing that is religiously, culturally and theologically valuable. Their worlds are treated as a modern day Nazareth from where nothing of value may emerge.

The authors recognize also the contributions of the church regarding immigrants, refugees and people who belong to minorities. Most NGOs



that work with immigrants: *John XXIII Peace Laboratory*, *Jesuit Refugee Service*, *The Sisters of the Good Shepherd*, *Kummissjoni Emigranti* and *Fondazzjoni Suret il-Bniedem*, are either Catholic NGOs or Catholic-inspired. They provide services to immigrants in detention centres and outside; attempt to educate the general public and some of them, even house immigrants within their premises. While we feel that these initiatives are highly laudable and should be encouraged, other aspects of the life of the Church are not so valiant and exemplary. One such example of lack of consciousness regarding the issue at hand was evident in the fact that the Catholic Schools commission does not keep statistics of children belonging to immigrants and ethnic minorities that attend Catholic schools (and no policy can be conceived and implemented without statistical and ethnographic data to inform it).

We feel that the local church lacks a collective consciousness and while we acknowledge pockets of individuals and church or/and catholic inspired organizations that work on this front, the general impression one has is that many consider the themes in question to be optional niche-themes, in contrast to wider, generally more ‘spiritual’, commitments of the church as a whole.

Indeed, the diocese does invite parishes to celebrate Refugee Day and provides posters and other materials. Yet, the impression one gets is that this is considered by many a priest to be a second-grade theme, in contrast to other more ‘spiritual’ themes. One of the authors who used to live at Birżebbuġa, a village which hosts a high number of immigrants, could evidence this in person. The Maltese inhabitants of the village have generally hostile feelings towards African immigrants. Yet, during Sunday Mass which he regularly attended, he never heard a priest condemn this, preach tolerance or at least remind the parishioners that racism is sinful. Clergymen that officiate at parishes which host detention and open centres are generally unaware that Catholic immigrants housed in these centres are as much a part of their parish as people born and bred within the area. There seems to be the implicit understanding that a parish (if not the diocese as a whole) is a unit defined by birth, rather than territory as is in fact the case. Hence, most of them fail to attend to the needs of these Catholics, as we could testify in a recent visit to an open centre. Catholic immigrants lamented that whereas Protestants and Muslims – who belong to religions that are a minority in Malta – could find ministers that cater for their spiritual needs on a weekly basis, they could not find catholic clergymen who regularly attend to their needs, even though they were in a country which is predominantly Catholic.

Chapter Three

A History

After the centuries-long Roman and Byzantine occupation, Malta became part of the *Dar al Islam* in 870. Though Count Roger the Norman made the islands a vassalage in 1091, the islands retained their Muslim character for a number of years¹¹ and Muslims continued to wield political power over local issues. It was King Roger the Second of Sicily who incorporated Malta in his kingdom. Gradually, some Christians started arriving on the island, probably acting as landlords over the rest of the population. Still, most people spoke Arabic and upheld the Muslim religion. Yet, though Islam remained the major religion, its influence and numbers started to decline, at first gradually (discrimination in favour of Christians may have induced some to a baptism of convenience) and then rapidly (some Muslims were probably expelled; others accepted baptism to escape this fate).

Certainly, the number of Christians hailing from a Muslim background was conspicuous, as evidenced by 14th century militia lists.¹²



This conversion shifted the religious ideology of the island. Islam became the quintessential ‘other’. Such ideology gained even more strength with the arrival in Malta of the Knights of the Hospitaller Order of Saint John in 1530, following their expulsion from the island of Rhodes. The Order adopted a military character during the Crusades and made the ‘war against the Muslim infidel’ its *raison d’être*. The Knights hailed from European aristocratic families. They did not accept Maltese nobles within their ranks and governed the much larger local population through a privilege-based, apartheid-like, policy. In this regard, Adrianus Koster holds that:

“It would not have been possible for the Knights to keep Malta if they lacked cohesion. Their small numbers, compared to the local population, made them vulnerable to conspiracies of the Maltese or attacks from abroad. But the Order was a coherent

¹¹ See Dalli, C. *Malta The Medieval Millenium* (Malta 2006)

¹² See Wettigner, G, ‘The Origin of Maltese Surnames’ in *Melita Historica*, 1999. Wettigner hypothesises that many Muslim were ‘Latinised’ by Sicilian notaries, to indicate a clear break with the Muslim past. Thus, surnames like ‘Salam’ were probably turned into ‘Pace’, while the surname ‘Mohammed’ is likely to have been twisted into ‘Mamo’.

unity ... It is common knowledge that the presence, imagined or real, of a mutual enemy stimulates coherence. It is clear that the Turks fulfilled such a role for the Knights of Malta. The Turks also provided the local Catholic population with a reason to accept the rule of foreign oligarchic clique: it protected them against the 'horrible' Muslims.”¹³

In the mind of the locals, these ‘enemies’ started to acquire definite, even though incorrect, physical characteristics. Some Maltese still do not distinguish between Arab and Turk, and most of them gradually started to think that the colour of their skin is inevitably black. Even when the ‘Saracen threat’ receded, during the British period (1800 – 1964), Blacks/Arabs/Turks/Muslim continued to play the role of the quintessential ‘other’. Local politicians, who as of the late nineteenth century sought to obtain a share in the country’s administration (British authorities generally preferred to keep political power to themselves, while allowing the local church to wield unhindered cultural, moral and economic hegemony), used to build their arguments on the premise that the Maltese were a European people, and therefore should not be treated as other non-European subjects of the empire. With the birth of political parties (c.1880), the local political scene was for almost 50 years dominated by pro-British and pro-Italian parties. As Meinrad Calleja notes, these shared:

“...one conspicuous common denominator; the model both groups were identifying themselves with was exclusively European Christian. The Maltese elite only substituted the British model with the alternative Italian one ...All other cultures or races were considered to be alien and socially undesirable, enforcing Malta’s ethnocentricity.”¹⁴

These biases and shortcomings were obviously enshrined in local culture.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

¹³ Koster, A *Prelates and Politicians in Malta* (Assen 1984) p. 22.

¹⁴ Calleja, M *Aspects of Racism in Malta* (Bormla 2001) p. 17

Chapter Four

Culture

Maltese cultural models tend to promote an essentialist understanding of Maltese history, identity and civilisation. These are conceived in terms:

“....of a set of properties and features ...believed to be rigid, constant and inflexible. ...Maltese identity and culture have traditionally been conceived in terms of characteristics like the upholding of the Catholic religion, a particular language (Italian or later on Maltese), descent from a particular ethnic group and certain characteristics like generosity or valour. These characteristics would be common to all Maltese, regardless of the place they lived in or the age. One cannot be Maltese and not exhibit these characteristics...Obviously, some characteristics like Christianity were acquired in time. But even this event is generally believed by these people to constitute the fulfilment of some eternal destiny, and hence the characteristic in question was already, in some way, ingrained through some celestial design or other grand plan...If cultures and identities are ‘changeless’, one culture may not intercourse or associate itself with another any without corrupting or obliterating it.”¹⁵

The different is essentially the ‘other’. Local writer Adrian Grima notes how this is reflected in traditional Maltese literature. This always conceived Maltese identity in contrast to, if not in conflict with, some ‘other’. Such literature

“...is full of racism and xenophobia, especially the romantic period. ...Foreigners (particularly non Europeans) were often seen in a bad light because they were ‘something else’, ‘not us’, ‘il-barrani’ (the outsider)”¹⁶

Grima refers to a local novel - *Taħt Tliet Saltniet* (Under Three Reigns) - written in the 1930s by Ġużè Aquilina, a major writer of the period, who at the time was considered a progressive writer. The novel is set in the 19th century and divides the world neatly in two groups; superior beings and inferior ones. This is evident in the presentation of two main characters:

“One of the characters, the Muslim slave “Il-Halwenija”, does not have a name, it is only a nickname. When she converts to Christianity, she gets a name, and when

¹⁵ Grech.M, ‘Min jibża mir-Raġel l-Iswed’ in Grech. M, ed. *Knisja tat-Triq* (Malta 2006) p. 96f

¹⁶ *The Independent on Sunday* 29th May 2005

she decides to become a nun, she gets yet another name. Therefore she is allowed an identity only because she becomes “like us”, Christian. One of the Maltese characters, Indri the singer, tells us that “Despite her dark skin, her face was attractive”!

Unlike the Arab Muslim Il-Halwenija, the Englishwoman Mrs. Flemington is treated with great respect and admiration by the narrator. Another Maltese character, De Flores, is enchanted by the smart widow’s “blue eyes, golden hair, and white skin.”¹⁷

Grima notes that neither the literary critics of the period nor later ones contrasted the explicit racism and prejudice present in this novel or in Maltese literature in general. One should here note that this and similar texts were up to a few years ago the staple literature in secondary and tertiary schools. Obviously, today’s schools teach respect of diversities and toleration. The integration of minorities is a cherished ideal. Yet, the ‘others’ - not merely foreigners, but also differently-abled individuals and people belonging to sexual and religious minorities - are exclusively considered a niche subject. They are ‘handled with care’, discussed in clearly delineated areas. Hence, it is quite uncommon to find school literature in subjects like Maltese and English that is about ordinary Muslims, Africans, homosexuals, families with a single parent or people with disability. The literature included in Maltese and English languages syllabi generally focuses on white Christians (if the religion of the characters is specified), people who are generally able-bodied and heterosexuals and ones who live in traditional families. The reality schools depict is generally monolithic and one-dimensional. The ‘other’ is confined to his/her niche. It is understandable, therefore, that when the ‘other’ trespasses the limits of his niche, s/he becomes undesirable, one who should be confined and restricted. The policy of automatic detention the government adopts reflects such an attitude.

17 *Ibid.*



Photo by: Colin Calleja



Photo by: Colin Calleja

Chapter Five

The role of education

Given what has been said in the previous section, a truly inclusive education in the Maltese context has a very hard task ahead of it. Students belonging to different ethnic minorities should be included in an inclusive and friendly environment. Schools should foster an environment wherein different ethnicities and cultures are recognised and cherished, and have the logistical means (interpreters, cultural assistants, etc.) to achieve such goals. Schools should also abandon outdated monolithic, romantic and stereotyped paradigms and models, and equip children to critically and analytically see through these. But are schools fulfilling this role?

An Introduction to the Educational discourse

Educational provision for children of migrants¹⁸ is regulated in Malta by legal notice 259 of 2002. Through this legal notice parliament has legislated that all children of migrants within the compulsory school age group (5 to 16 years) have the right to compulsory free education and to other provisions which the legislation contemplates, including support for the learning of any of the official languages and for the teaching of the language and culture of the country of origin of immigrant children (Eurydice *Integrating Immigrant Children into Schools in Europe – Malta: National Description 2003/04*).



Photo by: Colin Calleja

¹⁸ The Refugees Act, Act XX of 2000 recognizes all those persons who have been recognized as refugees and those granted humanitarian protection as falling under its protection.

The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in its report *Roma and Travelers in Public Education: An Overview of the situation in the EU Member States*, published in May 2006, emphasized that:

*“The multiethnic European landscape requires the development of national education strategies that combat discrimination and prejudice, while encouraging cultural exchange and enrichment in order to strengthen social cohesion, improve equality of opportunities and develop social capital. This is not only necessary for improving the productive capacity of human capital and achieving greater economic prosperity, but primarily because equality of opportunity and access to services is a fundamental right and key value of the European Union.”*¹⁹

This report shows that Malta has a long way to go in order to ensure equitable provision to children belonging to minorities. Much of what is being done, as the case studies will show, is sporadic; initiatives are often initiated by individuals out of personal interest. This report will show that there is no real policy effort by the educational authorities to promote initiatives that celebrate diversity and encourage cultural exchange and enrichment.

As the 2003/4 Eurydice report highlights, there are no measures offering school-based support to immigrant children and their families other than regular provisions. Eurydice 2006/7 reports little progress in this regard. According to this European data base:

*“Immigrant children are mainly included in Government schools although some immigrant children do attend Church schools (which are heavily subsidized by Government). They are expected to follow the curriculum like Maltese children. It is generally quite difficult to cater for their specific needs, particularly as regards to their language and culture since they are often children of ‘illegal / irregular’ immigrants, staying in Malta for an indefinite period, and coming from countries that generally are not represented diplomatically in Malta. Hence, it is difficult to obtain the support of the immigrants’ Government in the provision of the appropriate educational services. However, since English is an official language in Malta, some immigrant children integrate easily with Maltese children and they benefit from their attendance at school. Some schools organize the induction of immigrant children during their first few months at school, assuming that they would be staying for some time.”*²⁰

¹⁹ The European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) *Roma and Travelers in Public Education: An Overview of the situation in the EU Member States* May 2006, p. 3f

²⁰ Eurybase -Malta, 2006/07, p. 193f

This is also supported by the data collected for this study. Although in 2003 the education authorities had stated that they were actively setting up the operational framework for the implementation of the measures envisaged in the legislation (Eurydice 2003/4, p.4), little has been accomplished up to the writing of this study.

The Maltese Educational System and the migrant population

In compiling this study it became evident that there is a great lack of basic data regarding numbers, ethnicities and religious affiliations of school-aged children of migrant parents. This report had to design its own questionnaire, asking college principals to collect such basic information. There is even more lack of more qualitative data about how schools are responding to this relatively new phenomenon.

There are no official data or statistics regarding the numbers of children of minority groups attending pre-school education or kindergarten centres, primary and secondary schools, and post-secondary and tertiary education²¹. Grima and Bezzina (2008) note that while government provides free education to refugees who seek temporary asylum in Malta and also to children of irregular immigrants,

“we are as yet not in a position to analyse the existing systems to provide these children with an inclusive education, nor to study the impact that these children are having on the system at different levels”²²

Ethnic Minorities in Primary and Secondary State Schools

What follows is the statistical data collected from nine of the ten colleges which amalgamate a number of primary and secondary scholastic institutions according to geographical area. The information is elicited from a questionnaire we compiled and sent to the Education Directorate. It reveals a number of shortcomings. First, the data is limited only to state schools and thus does not take into consideration any ethnic minority students who attend Church schools and private schools. Second, it is limited to students who attend primary and secondary schools

21 In this regard, it is known that the University of Malta hosts a good number of foreign students, mainly temporary exchange students but some following full time courses in various Faculties. The great majority of these students hail from European countries and come to Malta through Erasmus Exchange programme. Another growing community, mostly following full time courses at the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accounts (FEMA) is the Chinese community. There are also students from Arab countries and the Middle East. Yet, there are no statistics regarding the intake of immigrant students within the University of Malta. Nor is any statistical data available regarding participation of migrant adults in Adult education and non-formal programs.

22 Grima and Bezzina (2008) p. 489f The researchers note that these children qualify for special support given to pupils facing learning difficulties. Nonetheless, this ‘help’ might reinforce the perception that children of migrant background suffer from some form of unfitness due to their ethnic origin, family socio-economic background or other reason. *Ibid.*, p. 493.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

(more or less, children from four to sixteen years of age). Third, one of the 10 state colleges queried failed to answer our questionnaire. Nevertheless, a close analysis of the data may yield interesting insights, which many times challenge long-accepted truths that riddle popular and political discourse. The data are presented in a series of tables accompanied by our comments.

Table 1:

Students of Ethnic Minority Origin in State Schools Scholastic Year (2008-2009)²³

COLLEGE	PRIMARY		SECONDARY	
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
College 1	21	21	2	9
College 2	17	10	6	13
College 3	50	48	38	53
College 4	6	6	17	NA
College 5	14	9	5	7
College 6	4	6	34	9
College 7	15	16	8	28
College 8	6	7	16	8
College 9	14	11	4	19
TOTAL	145 (26%)	134 (24%)	130 (24%)	146 (26%)
OVERALL TOTAL	555			

The number of ethnic minority students is surely not negligible. Considering the total number of students from ethnic minorities attending state schools there are no significant differences in numbers between primary and the secondary sectors. College 3 hosts the largest number of minority students, which highlights the geographical differences in relation to areas affected by multi-ethnic realities. Despite these numbers, the state is not recognising the importance of providing more specialised resources which would help the integration of these students in the different school communities.

The overall total of 555 students clearly warrants the need for specific resources.

²³ Please note that the Colleges are not listed in a particular order.










Table 2:

Students from Ethnic Minority Groups Attending State Schools Divided by Nationality (February 09)

Indians	5	Tunisians	13	Irish	6	Taiwanese	1
Bulgarians	44	Australians	10	Scots	3	Thai	5
Chinese	10	Ghanaians	1	Brazilians	5	Caribbeans	1
Egyptian	17	Ukrainians	10	Armenians	1	Belgians	2
Eritrean	7	Iraqis	7	Mongolians	1		
Philippinos	14	Americans	13	Chad	1		
Germans	20	Greeks	1	Swedish	3		
English	143	Italians	15	Hungarians	3		
Kurds	4	Norwegians	2	Jordanians	1		
Malta	14	Dutch	4	Pakistanis	2		
Moroccans	6	French	4	Albanians	2	In more generic terms	
Nigerians	5	Sierra Leone	2	Lithuanian	1	‘Blacks’	8
Serbs	22	Ethiopians	11	Palestinians	1	‘Dark Complexion’	2
Syrians	7	Swiss	1	Canadians	4	‘dark’ English	1
Somalis	9	Austrians	3	Slovenians	2	Caucasians	39
Turks	6	Romanians	8	Croatians	1	‘Coloured’	1
Congolese	5	Polish	3	Malai	1	‘Ethnic Minorities’	3
Libyans	20	Vietnamese	1	Czechs	2	Asian	1
Moldovans	3	Zimbabweans	1	Estonians	1	‘Arabs’	32
Russians	18	Bosnians	30	Slovakians	2		

Table 2.1:

Ethnicities according to region

Western Europe	221 (34%)	
Eastern Europe	153 (23.1%)	
North America	17 (2.5%)	
Latin America	6 (0.9%)	
North Africa	56 (8.5%)	
Sub Saharan Africa	43 (6.5%)	
Middle East	61 (9%)	
Far East	38 (6%)	
Oceania	10 (1.5%)	
Difficult to classify...	53 (8%)	
TOTAL	658	

Tables 2 and 2.1 make interesting reading in view of the multi-ethnic realities in Malta. The ethnic minority students under study hail from 76 different countries and from five continents. Contrary to popular perceptions, the majority of ethnic minority students hail from Western Europe and only 15% of ethnic minority students are Africans. Many of these students came to Malta through normal channels. Students who may be associated with the ‘boat people’ phenomenon experienced during these last six years only account for 24% (170 students) of the total number of ethnic minority students in state schools.

Moreover, one may also note that the lack of what may be termed ‘proper terminology’. In some cases vague terms such as ‘blacks’, ‘dark complexion’, ‘Arabs’, ‘Caucasians’ and ‘coloured’ were used, at times interchangeably. This denotes that professionals working with minority students may need the most basic cultural and heuristic tools to come to terms with a multi-cultural/multiethnic reality. In addition, when one considers Table 2.1, one may observe that the overall total in the overall table includes a further 103 students who are not accounted for in table 1. Although it is difficult to pinpoint the cause of this discrepancy, one may assume that one reason may be the difficulty to agree on who the children we are talking about actually are when referring to ethnic minority students.

Table 3:

**Different Religious Denominations among
Ethnic Minority Students**
(February 09)

PRIMARY		SECONDARY	
Orthodox	35	Orthodox	16
		Catholic	57
Catholic	75	Pentecostal Christian	1
Christian	12	Church of England	5
Evangelical	3	Protestant	1
Jehovah	5	Christian	23
Protestant	15	Jehovah Witness	4
Anglicans	4	Church of Scotland	1
Non-practicing catholic	2	Muslim	38
Muslim	80	Indian	1
Buddhist	9	Buddhist	2
Hindus	1	Atheist	8
No religion	13	Pagan	1
Atheist	3	No religion	11
Agnostic	4	“Non practicing”	1
“Not known”	21	“Not known”	25

Table 3.1:

**Number of Students and Percentages according to
Different Religions**

Christian	259 (54%)
Muslim	118 (25%)
Far Eastern Religions	13 (3%)
No religion/ Atheist/ Agnostic	41 (8.5%)
Not known	46 (9.5%)
TOTAL	477

In Table 3, one may observe that, contrary to popular perceptions, Muslim students account only for 25% of students belonging to minorities. This seems to contradict the widespread fear that multiculturalism is undermining the ‘Christian identity’ of the Maltese and opening the door to the Islamisation of the islands.

It is important however, to highlight the perception of some schools that argue that, due to the data protection act, schools cannot keep precise information in this regard, as they cannot ask directly for such information. This is probably the reason why the total of students is lower when compared to totals in Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 4:

Support provided to Ethnic Minority Students (February 09)²⁴

College	Support	Comments
College 1	8 Complementary Teachers 1 Learning Support Assistant (LSA)	“No further help”
College 2	12 Complementary	NA
College 3	35 Complementary 6 LSAs 1 Russian Language Teacher 15 Special lessons/exam papers	“Kull għajnuna possibbli biex jintegraw – jitgħallmu l-Malti u l-Ingliż.” (Every support possible to help them integrate; especially to learn Maltese and English)
College 4	NA	NA
College 5	4 Complementary 1 LSAs	
College 6	NA	NA
College 7	13 Language Support 21 Complementary	
College 8	2 LSAs 5 Complementary 6 LSAs/Complementary	Support from guidance teachers, resource teacher, Assistant Heads, bilingual newsletter to parents, exams in English
College 9	9 Complementary 4 Cultural Mediators	

²⁴ Please note that colleges are not listed in a particular order.

The quality and quantity of support to ethnic minority students seem to differ in different Colleges. While some Colleges do not offer specific support which may help the ethnic minority students to integrate, other colleges quote more specific help such as 'Russian Language Teacher', 'Language Support' and 'Cultural Mediators'. Nevertheless it seems that as a general rule specific support is still the exception. One reason for this might be the lack of funds and support from the Education Directorates whose policy seems to treat multi-ethnicity and the integration of ethnic minority students as 'students with special needs'.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

Chapter Six

What is being done...

We wished to substantiate the quantitative statistics with qualitative data which would help us delve deeper into the picture. We did this by carrying out a number of informal interviews with people who are working in areas which are easily (or not so easily) associated with multi-ethnic realities in Malta. The rendition of our interviews as reported below is categorised in two groups: good practice in schools and good practice by various government bodies, NGOs and individuals in the second part.

It is important to highlight that these are not the only positive realities present on the islands. Worth mentioning are the initiatives taken by the Pietà and San Pawl il-Bahar Primary schools, who over the years have initiated commendable activities celebrating diversity and multiculturalism, and initiated a number of inclusive practices. Also commendable is the work of the Freres who, for very long, have adopted inclusive multi-religious policies within their educational institutions.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

Good practice in Schools

Case Study 1: **Birżebbuġa Primary**

We interviewed the Head of the Birżebbuġa Primary school, a school within St Benedict College, whose population contains a good number of students belonging to different ethnic and religious minorities. There are 35 foreign students out of a school population of 300. These children originate from different countries, amongst which there are those coming from India, England, Croatia, Serbia, and others from different countries in Africa.

The number of students belonging to minorities is approximate since some of these students are ‘stable’; i.e. they belong to parents who live permanently in Malta; while others (around 12) are ‘temporary’, in the sense that they may enrol when the scholastic year has already commenced and/or leave before the school term ends, depending on the situation of their parents. The Head of school claims that the fact that they do not commence the scholastic year with the other students causes specific problems, notably psychological problems.

A major positive aspect highlighted by the Head of the school is the fact that the school acknowledges that Malta is a multicultural society (a fact which a good number of Maltese deny; some consider with dread the possibility of Malta becoming a multi-cultural society, denying that we already are multicultural), and uses a number of educational tools and initiatives (charts, language days, etc) aimed at educating both students and parents in this regard. This has facilitated the acceptance of such students by local children and parents, though incidents and difficulties remain.

Schools policies emphasise difference and dialogue in subjects like religion, social studies and Physical Education. Readers used in English language lessons are specifically chosen by the school so that the content (characters involved; names; pictures, etc) refers to people from different races and ethnicities. No such readers are available in Maltese.

The Head of school highlighted the need to teach children belonging to immigrant parents about their own culture; a culture which may be unknown to many of them. Some may have left their country of origin at birth or were born elsewhere. Given that their parents would not have come to Malta directly from their country of origin and would have spent several months or years in other places (e.g. Libya, different places in Africa, etc), they would feel perennially home-less. In this regard, the school organises events to teach them about their country of

origin, using computers and books, displaying their national flags, exhibiting pictures of their country of birth and providing them with information about it.

A suggestion was made to involve the students' parents, in order that they may provide primary information as to these places of origin and their culture. The Head of school, however, highlighted the difficulties (particularly logistical ones) they face when attempting to contact the student's parents.

A major problem the school encounters concerns communication. Some students/parents belong to minorities that cannot speak English, let alone Maltese. In this regard, the school authorities have contacted the Jesuit Refugee Services and asked for their help. The latter organised sessions with students and teachers aimed at discerning the problems and concerns of students belonging to minorities, and at eliminating linguistic barriers which segregate these students from the rest of the school. Their team contained translators from various places in Africa. Moreover, the school established an e-link with a translator who can help them on a regular basis. The initiative was taken by the school itself, and help was provided by an NGO (JRS) with limited resources. The contribution of the Education Directorates was conspicuous by their absence. Moreover JRS deals only with children belonging to African nationals, not with students that belong to other minorities.

The Head of School lamented the lack of experts who could expertly co-ordinate work with children who belong to minorities. In addition, he complained about the bureaucracy involved in applying for European projects that concern multi-ethnic education. He also suggested the formation of a team of officials assigned to the four schools that cater mostly for minority children, so that they can co-ordinate and suggest better measures in order to enhance the inclusion of minority children in schools.

Problems also occur because of the selection and streaming of students in terms of achievement which the Maltese educational set-up stipulates, particularly with regard to children who arrive when the scholastic year has already commenced. These end up in the lowest streams and this tends to de-motivate them. In this regard, a complementary teacher and other members of staff have set up an important initiative; they take immigrant children out of their class, group them together and hold a lesson (at least an hour a week) in a language they can understand (e.g. French, for those who come from French-speaking countries; English for students who can speak English, etc.) and where no extra effort to translate the content of the lesson from one language to another is required. Learning Support Assistants are also used. Another initiative the school undertakes is a 'buddy-system', whereby a student would team with a peer belonging to a minority (who is finding it hard to integrate because of linguistic and other reasons) and help

him/her accordingly. This is particularly important for students who begin attending classes after the scholastic year has commenced.

The success of such initiatives is assessed through staff meetings, curriculum teams and the School Development Plan (SDP). Indeed, inclusion and multi-ethnic teaching have been inserted as a separate unit within the SDP.

Case Study 2: Mariam-al Batool Islamic school (Paola)

An interesting example of good practice is the Muslim School, Mariam-al Batool. Given that Maltese state schools provide only the teaching of the Catholic religion, the Islamic Community in Malta felt the need to inaugurate a school which caters for the educational needs of Muslim children.



Yet, they wanted to give the school a

Maltese character. To start with, the school was named Mariam al-Batool after the Virgin Mary, a figure that is highly honoured in both Christianity and Islam, and is particularly venerated in Malta. Moreover, the school is run by both Muslim and Catholic teachers (indeed, there are more Catholic than Muslim teachers). The Head of the school is a Catholic woman.

When we asked Imam Mohammed El Sadi whether the existence of such a school creates a ghetto that hinders integration within Maltese society rather than promoting this, he claimed that the need for a Muslim school exists because of the difference between the values the Islamic school seeks to promote and those of mainstream Western culture. He referred to different approaches with regards to sexuality and alcohol consumption, which leads Muslim parents to be wary of state schools and prefer an Islamic institution.

With regard to refugee children, the Imam claimed that the school would gladly welcome them, but “they do not come”, and there is no one who arranges for them to attend. Nevertheless there is an organised group (including the Imam himself) that visits Muslim refugees/asylum seekers in open centres and in centres of detention.

Case Study 3: Sliema Primary School

The Sliema Primary School, within the Santa Klara college, receives a good number of children from minority groups. Out of a population of 145 students, 39 students are foreigners. Some are children of parents who are in Malta because of work and others have a Maltese parent who is married to a foreigner. The nationalities represented in this school are: Chinese, English, Indian, Libyan, Moroccan, Philippines, Bosnian, Serbian, Irish, Polish, Russian, Swedish, Italian, Bulgarian, and Ukrainian. These also make up for a healthy mix of religious denominations, namely, Roman Catholic (12), Muslims (10), Christian Orthodox (13), Hindu (1) and 3 children of agnostic parents.

Asked whether there are any special arrangements for these children at the time when the other children are doing religious education lesson, Ms. Sciberras, the Head of school, explained that since she has no extra teachers that can take them at that time, parents were informed on registration, that their children would have to remain in the classroom, either doing some extra work or in the case of older children, browsing the internet about their specific religion. Since the morning prayer is intentionally an open prayer, with no particular denominational meaning, all can participate. Ms. Sciberras explained that one parent has asked the teacher to allow her daughter to say the prayer in her language after the rest of the class finishes with theirs. The school had no objection to this and in fact this child prays in her language before lunch break.

During our interview, Ms. Sciberras mentioned how she encourages students to celebrate their national and religious feasts with the rest of the class. She explained how a child brought a cake to share with the rest of the class to celebrate the end of Ramadan. A meeting with all foreign parents was held in the second week of January, in order to learn from them about their respective national or/and religious festivals, and whether they would like the school to celebrate these occurrences. This would foster understanding and appreciation of different cultures. Ms Sciberras also explained that when one orthodox parent asked her for permission not to send her daughter to school on the 7th of January (Orthodox Christmas) she accepted, provided she wrote an explanatory note.

The school also makes an effort to accept different customs and traditions. She explained how recently a Hindu parent had asked the school to allow her daughter to wear a necklace which carries a religious meaning. The school, which has a no-jewellery policy, considered only whether the necklace would pose any danger to the girl's safety as a criterion.

Another positive initiative the school has started is the buddy system. On registration, every foreign child is shown the class and immediately twinned to a Maltese boy or girl who will sit next to the new pupil, and befriend and support him/her. The buddy helps the new classmate to get acquainted with the classroom routines and provides any other help that s/he might need, especially in the first days of school. The Head argued that this is helping these young children to socialize and integrate in the daily routines of the school. She also explained that children are great communicators and even when they cannot speak the language, they manage to communicate.

Regarding the language policy for foreign students, the school uses English in the first three months after they arrive. The Head explained that children take approximately three months to learn the basic language register and then they are generally ready to start another language, namely Maltese. These children are also accorded the services of a complementary teacher who focuses on their school-related language needs. This allows them to communicate with the teacher and the rest of the class in the shortest time possible. The complementary teacher supports them both inside the classroom and, when need arises, in the 'support room'. English speaking pupils follow the regular timetable, though support is provided during lessons in which the Maltese language is used. On registration, both the complementary teacher and the regular teacher research about the native language of the student, to decide about the methodology to use to introduce him/her to the Latin alphabet. Ms. Sciberras explained that a Chinese child would have to learn how to recognize and associate the shape to the sound of letters that would be completely new to him/her.

One experience that Ms. Sciberras mentioned was the case of a young Chinese boy who by the end of the scholastic year managed to win the prize for the best effort in learning Maltese language. As of 2008, the school started recognizing the effort that these children make, and hence instituted a best language effort prize that these young foreign children can receive.

Another interesting initiative which the school is undertaking is to ask parents to identify and translate words that are frequently used in their language, so that the teacher and the child can refer to them when they need to communicate certain needs. The school is also planning to get some basic information about the school and the school's basic policies, rules and routines translated into different languages, so as to hand it to parents, particularly to those that are unable to communicate properly in English. In this way, it is hoped that both parents and children feel more welcome and an integral part of the school. The school also uses older children who can now communicate well in Maltese or English to act as interpreters when need be. These would speak Maltese and/or English and another language, and act as a go-between. At times, they also have to call parents at their place of work.

Parents of foreign children are very much involved in the daily life of the school. Ms. Sciberras explained that during The European day of Languages, parents of different nationalities prepare food from their respective countries and share it with the rest of the school community. Each parent explains the origin and history of the food item in question. Ms. Sciberras hopes that, come the next school council election, one of the elected members would be a parent of a foreign child. This will continue to strengthen the voice of these minority groups.

A final project the school is initiating as a closure to last year's theme – *Inclusion* - is the project 'One World'. The project consists of children's researching about different countries of the world, with special emphasis on those nations from which the foreign children attending this school originate. Each class is responsible for 3 countries – a country per term. Ms Sciberras explained one such activity. Supported by their teacher, the pupils in this class wrote a story called 'Katya from Russia', drew pictures and coloured them. Once finished, they read the story and recorded it on a computer. The teacher scanned the pictures and turned this story into an e-book that may be shared with visitors and parents during an open day.

As part of this project, the art teacher coordinated an art activity which aims to produce a large, drawing of the world map on a wooden surface (see picture below). Children were instructed to trace the outline of the map and draw the different countries, using different media. The younger children drew the different flags of the nationalities represented in the school and hung them on the map.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

Good practice elsewhere

Apart from schools the report identified other individuals, projects, sites, and organizations which reflect good practice in the field of education. What follows are such examples of good practice.

1. The National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE)

has only recently widened its concern to issues related to discrimination based on ethnicity (not religion), focusing on areas like housing, education, right to healthcare and (in the forthcoming months) the provision of goods and services. The relative novelty of this concern entails that initiatives are necessarily at an embryonic stage. NGOs that work with asylum seekers were invited to a general meeting whereby different kinds of discriminations were defined, in order to produce a joint effort to tackle discrimination in general. Given the lack of official statistics, these NGOs were also asked to provide NCPE with feedback as to what needs to be done, as well as with data concerning their field.



A case of good practice initiated by the commission is the programme MOSAIC, a programme that aims to address the fears and misconceptions that lie behind discrimination, and to increase awareness of the negative effects that such fears and misconceptions have on society. The types of discrimination considered are discrimination based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, age, religion or belief, and disability. The programme included a campaign entitled 'Discrimination Hurts', involving the provision of information, posters, inter-active drama in schools, radio and television programmes, film festivals, school competitions and training concerning different types of discrimination.

On a critical note, one has to note that the success criteria for the initiatives taken by MOSAIC were not specified or clearly underlined. Moreover, the organisers complained about the lack of funds available for such projects. The only source of income – needed to fund projects related to education and discrimination in general - has up to now been the EU. Money has been unavailable from local sources.

2. Appogg, the national social welfare agency for children and families in need, organised *Equal* - a project that had the dual aim of (i) providing training on various topics to a number of asylum seekers,



in order to help them integrate in Maltese society (ii) offering them the necessary support, counselling and guidance to facilitate their integration in the labour market. The programme included vocational guidance, the setting up of a counselling team, the provision of information packs for asylum seekers and the enrolling of asylum seekers as councillors and child carers. Emphasis was laid on the teaching of the English language as well as on acquainting asylum seekers with European culture. From the feed back provided by *Appoġġ*, it seems that the project targeted adults in their twenties, thirties and forties. The agency also supplied very clear records regarding the outcome of the project: number of trainees 116 (89M – 27F); number of trainees certified at the end of the project 107 (85M – 22F). The criterion of success was the successful completion of the course.

3. SPICES - (Social Promotion of Intercultural Communication Expertise and Skills) The University of Malta joined other European partners in a project aimed at providing knowledge, expertise and skills in Inter Cultural Communication (ICC), organised under the auspices of the European project Socrates/Grundtvig. The project is primarily directed at adults: intercultural communication facilitators, mediators, educators, second language teachers. In turn, these would enhance the intercultural communication competence of others. The consortium developed a number of exercises, text analysis, transcription of spoken audio-/video-recorded interactions and ethnographic conversation, learning according to specific communicative needs and settings, interactive training in small groups through problem solving, simulations and role plays. The project has been followed by a mobility grant, e-SPICES to further disseminate this good practice.

4. In August, 2009 the **General Worker's Union (GWU)**, the largest workers' union in Malta, launched a campaign to include within its concerns the condition and status of working asylum seekers. In this regard, GWU officials informed us that education is one of the union's major concerns, though things at this stage are still at a preparatory level. A conference dealing with education, including the integration of asylum seekers within the local educational set-up, was held in the early days of December, 2009.

5. An officer at the Education Directorate, voluntarily drafted a proposal regarding school attendance of unaccompanied asylum seekers. He claims that research needs to be carried out regarding school attendance of school-aged asylum seekers. Officials in charge of detention and open centres should see that such children are getting the education to which they are entitled. He mentions a number of possible difficulties and challenges that a serious policy would entail including (i) an increase in the teaching staff as well as the employment of cultural mediators; (ii) social-work required to ensure that school-age asylum seekers are attending

school and (iii) training aimed at acclimatising schools to the particular problems of migrant children and/or locals.

The officer also drafted suggestions regarding the enhanced integration of children who are already attending school. He met people involved in education, and studied systems being adopted in the UK regarding the integration of such students. His report considers two alternatives: a 'feeder' system whereby a school is purposefully set up to cater for the needs of asylum seekers, with a view at integrating these within mainline schools at a later stage; having asylum seekers attending mainline schools at once. Unfortunately, the educational authorities discouraged his initiative, claiming that other priorities exist that ought to take precedence over this issue.

6. Marsa Open Centre - We met pastor Ahmed Bugri, co-ordinator of the Marsa open centre, an open centre run by the Capuchin foundation *Suret il-Bniedem*. The centre hosts asylum seekers who have been freed from detention. With pastor Bugri we discussed educational opportunities, both within the open-centre and in general. As to the open-centre, pastor Bugri informed us that there are language courses for those interested in learning languages such as English and French. However, a wider education project was inaugurated in January 2009. The new project would include courses in English, health and safety, ICT and disease control. The



Photo by: Colin Calleja

project is funded by the EU, though an American University and other institutions have also offered their help. The immigrants will be charged a nominal fee (e.g. 50 euro cents per month). As a part of the project, the premises dedicated to the education centre have been refurbished. Pastor Bugri emphasised that classes would not include more than 20 students, so that it would be possible for tutors to pay individual attention to students and monitor their progress. Emphasis would be on feedback and follow-up. A number of practical tasks (the ability to write a good C.V. and job application, the ability to sit for an interview in English, etc) would be used to assess students, as well as the project itself. Individual tutors and classes would also be encouraged to set their own targets.

In addition, the centre would employ an information officer whose duties include research, the provision of information regarding job opportunities, the labour market, EU projects, as well as basic information regarding local culture, and the workers' rights and duties. As to mainstream education, pastor Bugri confirmed that there are a number of immigrants with a good level of education who would like to further their studies. These face a number of difficulties, the most important being funding. The few grants asylum seekers receive or the income they earn are generally not enough to allow them to live, send money home and pay for their education at the same time. The University of Malta only accepts two or three asylum seekers; the others would have to pay tuition fees. Currently, there are some asylum seekers attending university, though these live in the community and not in the centre. There are, however, others who attend MCAST, who also have to pay tuition fees. In the months to come, the centre aims to get ETC and MCAST training directly at the centre, rather than having asylum seekers attending courses elsewhere.

These experiences and others not reported here are a good start to cultivate a culture of respect and inclusion. This document continues by making a series of recommendations and suggestions for cultivating a more inclusive society.

Chapter Seven

Recommendations

What follows are some suggestions we would like to forward for consideration by the appropriate authorities.

1. Over the past year we have seen important changes in the structure of the Educational System. The Department of Education has been reorganised into two General Directorates with a number of Directors responsible for various services. One of the important departments within the Directorate for Educational Services is the Department responsible for students' services. We would therefore like to recommend **the setting up of an office within this department that is specifically responsible for monitoring the services provided by schools to students from ethnic minorities and/or other minority groups and providing them with support.**
2. Unfortunately, as various entities have pointed out, there are no statistics being collected regarding members of ethnic minority groups. Over the years we have tried to find information regarding numbers and specificities of members of different ethnic groups attending our schools. None could be found. The consequence is that extreme perceptions, over-exaggeration or minimization of the issue, are widespread both amongst the general public and, more seriously, within policy-influencing circles. We therefore strongly recommend that the **National Statistics Office (NSO) is given the responsibility and the resources to regularly collect such important data.** The data should include the number of school-age individuals according to ethnic groups, age, religious denomination, and gender. Data should also include information on the number of school-age children from ethnic minorities that are actually attending schools, and the special provisions that educational institutions are offering.
3. The presence of children belonging to different cultural and ethnic groups within our schools is a reality. Yet, teachers and school leaders are experiencing this reality with no adequate training and preparation. Such a challenge needs a prompt response by the appropriate authorities in terms of support and more importantly training. We would therefore recommend that **all senior management and teachers, starting from those schools that are already receiving a sizable number of children from ethnic and minority groups, are given specific training in intercultural communication and the skills to help them deal with this new reality.**

4. Because of their catchment area, some schools receive a greater influx of children from ethnic groups and other minorities than others. **It is therefore crucial that these schools are supported in this task through the provision of Cultural Mediation services, particularly those relating to parents.** This would facilitate the integration of these children and their families within the school culture.
5. **Government should seek European funding to provide such services, particularly to schools housing a substantial amount of students belonging to ethnic minorities.**
6. The multicultural and multi-ethnic reality should be reflected in the educational texts that teachers and students use. The textbooks chosen should reflect different ethnicities and recognize the richness and opportunities that such diversity entails. We therefore recommend that
 - a. **Textbooks that are in circulation be reviewed for ethnic and minority correct language and concepts;**
 - b. **When new textbooks are considered, considerations related to the representativity of different minorities should be taken into consideration.**
7. The educational system needs to value and cherish diversity. We therefore recommend that all schools, particularly those that have children belonging to religious and ethnic minorities, **should include within their calendar commemorations of the major festivities pertaining to different minorities.**
8. The worst policy the Maltese educational set-up may adopt is the ghettoisation of immigrant children and their concentration in specific areas. We therefore recommend that **immigrants that have been released from detention are given housing in different parts of the island,** thus avoiding ghettoization and the negative connotations that such a practice can bring. **Schools should reflect the different ethnic minorities that live in the country at large.**
9. This report noted a dangerous practice common in most schools, the provision to children of ethnic families (particularly to those of irregular and refugee groups) of the same educational support given to children with some physical impairment. **We believe that these children need a different type of educational support, not the remedial type actually provided.** It would be a disservice if we were to label these children as disabled, when their problems are of a totally different nature. This reaffirms the recommendation made in point 3.

10. One major problem school children are facing, in particular those whose parents cannot support them academically, concerns homework; i.e. the inability to find people who may help them carry out the assigned work. Children of migrants very often find themselves in this situation; while at school they have the support of their teacher, returning home they find very little support. **We therefore recommend the setting-up of centres that mentor and help these children with their homework and study within the vicinity of the open-centres.**
11. Research has extensively shown that self-fulfilling prophecies do exist and teachers often find themselves reacting to the perceived limitations they set on their students. **Teachers should therefore develop positive attitudes and have high expectations of all children, in particular of minority students** who, due to cultural differences and other reasons, might initially be confused regarding their role in this new set-up.
12. The experience of other countries shows that teachers who themselves are of migrant or minority background have a positive influence on migrant achievement in schools. Hence, we recommend that **young people of ethnic minority background are encouraged and financially supported to follow teaching careers.**
13. Ethnic minority children should possess a good command of Maltese and/or English languages as early as possible. We therefore recommend that **schools organise intensive language courses for children (and parents) of minority groups.** This should not be construed as some kind of remedial teaching, but merely a focused deployment of second and/or foreign language teaching methodologies.
14. With support from NGOs, embassies and other entities, **schools should offer the teaching of the language of origin of children of different ethnic background.**
15. **School canteens should cater for dietary needs of children belonging to different ethnic, religious and social groups.**
16. **Centres that cater for adult education should be more open to persons of minority and ethnic background and offer relevant courses that help integration.**



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Conclusions

The measure of a civilized society is the care it takes to offer appropriate and proportionate support to all members of the community. Countries that in this regard are taken as paradigm models, such as Finland, attribute part of their success to the importance they assign to the value of equity in education (Ministry of Education, Finland 2005).

Malta's only sustainable asset is its human resources. Thus, any investment in human potential needs to be encouraged. All competencies of all members of society, including those who belong to minorities and ethnic groups living on the island, are to be fostered and encouraged, so that every person is in a position to contribute to national prosperity.

Lack of adequate investment in schooling and school-based competencies of children of ethnic minority background leads to poor economic conditions, greater stress, lower levels of social participation and general inability to participate effectively as members of a modern society.

Hence, we would like to point to four important tools that both the literature and the experience of other successful countries have demonstrated to be necessary to address equity issues. The tools are:

- 1. Investment in Early Childhood Education:** This educational stage is crucial for addressing inequalities that children manifest. An education system that aims at attaining high quality education for all learners needs to ensure that the service offered at this stage is of high-quality, delivered by highly qualified personnel and available to all on equitable terms. This stage should be characterised by features like care, social skills, emotional development and pre-literacy activities.
- 2. A Variety of Support:** The educational system should ensure a variety of support structures both within schools and inside the community. Such support structures can only be set up if adequate funding is provided. This support needs to be localized within the collages, preferably within individual schools. Support should extend from human resources, to infrastructure, to a variety of multisensory and other learning resources. Support needs to follow adequate screening, to avoid streamlining all children who need some form of support as special (disability) needs. This will ensure that children of minority and ethnic background are not put into special needs programmes when their needs lie elsewhere.

- 3. A variety of second-chance programmes:** It is inevitable that in any system one finds individuals who for a variety of reasons fall out of mainstream education. A system that values all learners and believes in the potential of every learner should provide opportunities and possibilities for members who have derailed, to enable them to make their way back into the educational system or else find alternative routes to productive employment. We encourage the educational authorities to continue investing in more programmes that support those who find themselves at risk of failure to integrate as productive citizens. Students of migrant and ethnic backgrounds often find themselves in such situations (generally for socio-economic reasons) and hence, such programmes can be particularly beneficial.
- 4. Data collection, analysis and evaluation:** As we pointed out in our recommendations, good policy-making needs to be built on strong data. Basic statistical data regarding ethnic minorities living in Malta is needed to direct the type, quality and quantity of support and resources to schools and communities. Data and its analysis would also identify where there are equity problems, and which programmes or provisions are more effective than others. For some reason the National Statistics Office (NSO) still cannot see the importance of collecting information on ethnic minorities in Malta. We have no data regarding children from ethnic minority communities attending Maltese schools, such as religious and ethnic affiliations, the type of support offered to these students, and other important data that prove to be crucial when one is designing a policy or policies that ensure equity of provision.

This report has attempted to describe, analyse and offer solutions to the important issue that Maltese schools are facing. There is no one answer to this multi-faceted issue; it is only through a complex implementation of policies, programmes and measures based on the values of solidarity and respect for human life that the principle of equity can be put to practice, thus enriching the learning experience of every learner.



Photo by: Colin Calleja

Afterword

In John's gospel Jesus calls us friends and tells us to befriend one another. This simple but profound relationship has characterized my personal life from early childhood. Only later in life did I come to know that people whose skin was of another colour, or whose language and culture were not my own, were shunned as the "different other," their presence not always welcome, their gifts not always acknowledged, their lives not always integrated into and appreciated by the societies in which they lived.

I was one of six children, raised in Brooklyn, New York, in a middle class neighbourhood with few "black" children in sight. But each Christmas my parents would adopt a little baby from an orphanage to celebrate with us and live as a member of our family for about three weeks. At that early age, (I remember best the years from ages six to nine,) it was fun to take care of these children, many of whom were African-American, and it was sheer joy to play with them. From these experiences I came to know intuitively that the "different other" was a person just like me, and we were all kin.

It is providential that I was asked to write this afterword during the fifth centenary anniversary of the arrival in 1510 of the first Dominican missionaries in the Americas. Among the first to arrive were friars Montesinos and Cordoba, sent from Spain to Hispaniola (now the Dominican Republic) to work with the indigenous peoples there. Their profound respect for and defense of these Taino people is legendary. But what made this first group of Dominicans treat the "different other" as friends and kinsmen, in such contrast to their Spanish counterparts? Only fifteen months after their arrival, Montesinos, supported by his community of friars, preached a powerful sermon. His words still resound, even to this day: "By what right and by what justice do you hold these Indians in horrible servitude? By what authority do you carry out such detestable wars against the peoples of the land?" Clearly it was the gospel that inspired them, and their listening to the experiences of the indigenous peoples that prodded them to befriend the weak and to see them as kin.

Presently, in the United States we are engaged in a terrible struggle in Arizona over how to deal with undocumented immigrants. One of my Dominican sisters wrote to me, using Montesinos' challenge: "Are not illegal immigrants human beings? What right do the politicians, individuals and ourselves have to ignore, prosecute and persecute them? Is it because they will take advantage of our welfare system, our free education, our hospitals? Should these not be rights for every one in the United States, regardless of their legal status, because they are human beings, children of God too?"

Your book, a carefully prepared analysis of the education of children from many different ethnic minorities in the schools of Malta, is instructive far beyond its intended audience. Your island is a microcosm, and as such it reflects the tensions experienced in many other parts of the world. I recall coming out of the multi-media presentation on your history entitled, "The Malta Experience," a record of so many waves of conquest and occupation. I asked my Maltese hostess, "So who is your real enemy?" And she replied, "Hopefully no one, if we took what was best in each and incorporated it into our culture and country, and we would all be the richer."

Before concluding, I want to share what happened to me when, for a time, I was the “alien,” a new person in a new land. Before returning from Rome to the United States to serve in congregational leadership, I lived for over two years in different countries in Africa—Kenya, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa. I was the “different other,” without a home or kin. It was not long, however, before I was welcomed warmly among these African communities, and realized anew how very much alike we all are, regardless of age, race, or gender. We all want to be included into society, treated with respect and recognized for who we are, each of us unique, sisters and brothers within the human community.

With the beautiful insight of my Maltese hostess, and the wisdom and experience reflected in your book, we too are enriched. You are not alone in the struggle and God-given opportunity to integrate and welcome the “different other.” Your book can be a valuable tool to facilitate this integration and allow it to be a blessing for the good of Malta, most especially for the children from all the vibrant ethnic communities of the island. But for the many of us, far beyond your shores, who share your concerns and your dedication to this cause of integration, I say a heartfelt thank you. Thank you, Colin Calleja, Michael Grech and Bernard Cauchi for providing for all of us this background analysis and study, culminating in such a helpful list of good practices and recommendations.

Sr. Margaret Ormond OP

Member of the Dominican Sisters of Saint Mary of the Springs

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Sr. Margaret attended Dominican Academy in Manhattan where she first met the Dominican Sisters and first thought about religious life.

She then went to Marymount Manhattan College in New York and decided to enter the Dominican Order after two years of College. Sr. Margaret finished her college education at St. Mary of the Springs College (now Ohio Dominican University) in Columbus, Ohio, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in History. From there, she studied in Rome, Italy at Angelicum University and received a Bachelor of Sacred Theology, followed by a Licentiate in Sacred Theology.

Sr. Margaret was the first Director of Dominican Sisters International in Rome and has traveled the world visiting Dominican Sisters serving on every continent. She has also ministered in seven African countries including: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Presently she serves as Prioress of Dominican Sisters of Peace, a new congregation formed from seven other Dominican congregations.

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